LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 1132
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

New Light on Witchcraft

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HALDEMAN-JULIUS COMPANY
GIRARD, KANSAS

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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NEW LIGHT ON WITCHCRAFT

CHAPTER I

THE WITCH OF TRADITION

Twelve years ago a very distinguished literary colleague of George Bernard Shaw said to me: "Shaw is in senile decay." Ten years later I went to see Shaw's *Joan;* and I concluded that if the dramatic feeling, the mastery of stage-craft, the agility and sureness of insight into human nature, of that remarkable play were symptoms of advanced senility I would reconsider my design to avoid that normal period of existence.

And the play just as plainly indicates the strength or stubbornness of its author in its chief defect; it is an historical play and it is entirely unhistorical. Many years ago Shaw decided that historians do not know how to write history, and he would teach them. Unfortunately, in order to grasp the truth of a single personality of an earlier and different age one has laboriously to learn a mass of detail about that age, and labor of that kind does not fascinate men of febrile imagination. Shaw cannot write history.

Was Joan of Arc a witch? Shaw may have heard that there are a few quite scholarly people who think it possible that she was. Scholarly people, he would say, can believe anything.

He robustly excludes the very possibility. The charge of witchcraft against "the Maid" was a mere pretext of priests and politicians; and Shaw, in his scorn of science and Rationalism, so surprisingly exonerates the priests and the Inquisition in his play that a Catholic weekly actually announced that he was about to enter the Church.

The murder of Joan was plotted by soldiers and statesmen—English soldiers and statesmen, of course—and the poor priests were bullied and cajoled into a tragi-comic trial for witchcraft.

It was quite plain that Mr. Shaw does not know that our idea of witchcraft has been radically altered. He does not even know that one of the characters he introduced into his play, Gilles de Rais, the original "Bluebeard," was, not the indolent court-fop and trifler he makes him, but a very stern and earnest young man, Joan's most intimate friend, and a witch. Probably Shaw does not know that there were male witches as well as female, and that the child in her mother's arms, the maid of fifteen, or the winsome young mother of twenty-two, might be a witch just as easily as the old wrinkled dame who lived in a cottage on the edge of the wood and gathered her herbs by the light of the moon.

It is this new conception of witchcraft, which we will fully explain in this book, and will apply to the trial of Joan of Arc, that brings the subject within the program of religious controversy which I am realizing. This horrid massacre of women age by age was tragic enough even on the old conception of witches.

Any old dame, widow or spinster, who was wise enough to wish to avoid the cackle of her empty-headed neighbors was apt to be suspected of witchcraft. The child who fell ill—inoculated by the open drain or cess-pool by the door—had passed her in the street, and so had clearly been bewitched. The mother who had a mis-carriage, the farmer whose pigs sickened ....The witch! Drown her out of hand, or, less humanely, let the priest see to it; and then the horrors of trial and torture will be added to the injury of death.

This thing occurring during many centuries all over Christendom concerns us just as much as does the beauty of a cathedral. I am not indicting the Church; not merely gathering all the dishonoring facts which can be picked here and there out of the history of medieval Europe. We are seriously studying the effect upon civilization of the acceptance and world-establishment of Christianity. It created a new frame of mind, a new outlook on life, a new character; and this new spirit expressed itself in, amongst other things, the torture and burning or drowning of some hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of men and women on the ground that they were witches. And the crime was directly inspired by the new religion. The sole inspirations of the murderous attitude were belief in the devil and the express statement of the Bible that witches were in league with evil spirits and must be put to death. In the fully developed law of the Church witchcraft was heresy. It was a religious crime.

This was dreadful enough even if we suppose,

as is commonly supposed, that the murdered women were yellow, soured, misanthropic old dames from whom death was in any case not far distant. No doubt a poor, brooding, solitary old woman would be more likely than any other in the village to incur popular suspicion. Harenet, one of the earliest English denouncers of the belief in witchcraft (though no modern book ever mentions him), before the end of the seventeenth century thus ironically reminded the witch-hunters of one common type of their prey:

> An old woman with a wrinkled face, a furrowed brow, a hairy lip, a gobber tooth, a squint eye, a squeaking voice, or a scolding tongue, having a ragged coat on her back, a spindle in her hand, and a dog by her side—a wretched, infirm and impotent creature, pelted and persecuted by all the neighbors because the farmer's cart had stuck in the gateway, or some idle boy had pretended to spit needles and pins for the sake of a holiday from school or work.

Life was hell to these old dames for near a thousand years after the establishment of the religion which is said to have uplifted woman.

Yet Catholic literary men and priests and Protestant preachers, who are never serious students of history, finds this old-hag theory of witchcraft convenient. Sorry for the old ladies, of course, but....You can understand it, can't you? The edge of your resentment is dulled. These glib word-spinners remind you of the vivid faith of those heroic days—the greater sensitiveness to the devil's work in the world—the living fear of God, and so on. In other books I tell enough about the real Middle Ages to spoil this pretty argument. Let me add one word here.

I have just been looking up some references to witches in Latin writings of the tenth and eleventh century. They will be given presently, but my eye wandered a little over the yellow pages of these old collections of Church-laws of Bishop Burkhard of Worms and Abbot Regino of Prume, and the picture they suggest of the Christian women of the time is incredible. The bishop imagines himself asking the women questions, as the priest does now in the confessional. The law would not permit me to translate his questions.

But the worse error of these apologists, the popular fallacy which is still all but universal in Christendom, is to suppose that the witches were even for the greater part old women. Thousands of reports of witch-trials have now been studied, and from the hundreds that I have myself read, at least in summary, I should say that feeble old dames were a comparatively small minority. Maids in their teens, like Joan of Arc, are appallingly common amongst the victims. Young women in their twenties and thirties, strong and defiant of the priests, seem to be almost in the majority. Men are frequent amongst them; and the men include numbers of priests, nobles, lawyers, etc. Let me anticipate to the extent of quoting the translation of a letter written at Wurtzburg during the persecution there in 1629:

> There are still four hundred in the city, high and low, of every rank and sex—nay, even clerics—so strongly accused that they may be arrested any hour. Some out of all offices and faculties

must be executed; clerics, counsellors, doctors, city officials and court assessors. There are law students to be arrested. The prince-bishop has over forty students here who are to be pastors; thirteen or fourteen of these are said to be witches. A few days ago a dean was arrested; two others who were summoned have fled. The notary of our church consistory, a very learned man, was yesterday arrested and put to torture. In a word, a third part of the city is involved. A week ago a maiden of nineteen was put to death, of whom it is everywhere said that she was the fairest in the whole city and was held by everybody a girl of singular modesty and purity. She will be followed by seven or eight others of the fairest. There are three hundred children of three or four years of age who are said to have had intercourse with the devil. I have seen put to death children of ten, promising students of ten, twelve, fourteen, fifteen, etc.

This is not a page from some history of witchcraft in which the writer is rhetorically embroidering a statement of a contemporary chronicle. It is part of a letter written at the time, the year 1629, in the city of Wurtzburg itself, and by no less a person than the bishop's chancellor. No more veracious document could be imagined. And it is just by chance that in a single city out of hundreds we get this contemporary and authoritative account of the terror that for a time blanched the faces of the citizens.

This single passage must, although it belongs to an exceptionally ferocious period of witch-hunting, convince any reader at once that the popular idea of witchcraft is entirely false. I say "popular," but it is singular how slow even scholars, historians and scientists, have been to grasp the remarkable significance of the

witch-movement. In the latest edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which is certainly the finest work of general reference to which the public can turn for information, the article on "Witchcraft" is totally inadequate. The author is a competent ethnographer, yet he writes almost entirely from the traditional point of view. Only in the last few lines he mentions the very suggestive fact, without perceiving its significance, that in Italy today witchcraft is still called *la vecchia religione*—"the old religion"—and that in its historical phenomena we must recognize a stratum of popular beliefs which are "derived in the main from pagan sources."

The *New International Encyclopaedia* is no better, and the generally very able and informing *Dictionary of Religion and Ethics* entirely omits the subject! Yet one point which is quite fatal to the popular conception has been established in every history of witchcraft. This is that witches were not merely, or even usually, old women whose repulsive forms or isolated lives drew popular suspicion upon them. The fairest maids of a town were just as liable to be dragged before the Roman Inquisition or the Protestant bishop as was the old dame who lived alone on the outskirts of the village. Hundreds, if not thousands, of maids like Joan of Arc were drowned or burned at the stake as witches. Women of all ages, from the babe upward, were arraigned. Women of every rank figure in the lists of victims. Men also of every rank and degree of education or illiteracy enter the chronicle. Theologians, lawyers,

nobles, and leaders of armies are found as well as peasants and artisans.

And it will farther transpire that even the young women met the sentence of death in the same spirit as the girl-martyrs—the very few *genuine* girl-martyrs—of the early Church. They spat at the religion of their Christian persecutors. They had, they said, a higher religion, and would die rather than abjure it. The Church, it is true, in most cases left them no opinion. By a refinement of brutality it enjoined that they should be fiendishly tortured to extract confessions; then, in order to have a formal assurance of their guilt, it held that confessions thus wrung from them in the agony of torture were "voluntary confessions"; and finally it said that, since conversions professed out of fear of torture were unreliable, the witches might and ought to be put to death. Most of them, therefore, suffered death in silence. But we shall see that in numberless cases they defied their tormentors and murderers, and boasted that they died for a greater faith than the belief in Jesus.

Hence there is an increasing tendency to regard witchcraft as an organized religion. The best history of witchcraft is Dr. W. G. Soldan's *Geschichte der Hexenprozesse*, as edited by Max Bauer in 1911: a fine two-volume work, superbly illustrated, which has unfortunately not been translated. In the final chapter the authors discuss all the views of witchcraft during the last hundred years, and they fail to realize its full significance. They are disposed to regard too many details as mere concessions under torture to the queries of the judges or as hysterical illusions.

Much sounder, though it is little more than an account of trials in England, is Miss M. A. Murray's *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921). Miss Murray, of London University, has written a model work within her limits: candid and scholarly. The reader will find it a revelation and, in spite of the tragedy, a most entertaining work. Her conclusion is (p. 12):

> The evidence proves that underlying the Christian religion was a cult practised by many classes of the community, chiefly however by the more ignorant or those in the less thickly inhabited parts of the country. It can be traced back to pre-Christian times and appears to be the ancient religion of western Europe. The god, anthropomorphic or theriomorphic, was worshiped in well-defined rites; the organization was highly developed; and the ritual is analogous to many other ancient rituals. The dates of the chief festivals suggest that the religion belonged to a race which had not reached the agricultural stage. . . . It was a definite religion with beliefs, ritual, and organization as highly developed as that of any other cult in the world.

In saying that it was chiefly the religion of the more ignorant, Miss Murray seems to have forgotten that at least 95 percent of the people of Europe were then illiterate, and she, perhaps, gives a wrong impression as to the survival of the religion from pre-Christian times. On the other hand, the more recent and more popular work of J. W. Wickmar, *Witchcraft and the Black Art* (1926), while it agrees that witchcraft was "essentially a religious organization with priests of its own," is not entirely

satisfactory. A writer who puts a trial of Apollonius of Tyana before the Emperor Domitian in the year 300 B. C. (p. 27) must be read with caution!

Here, while acknowledging a great indebtedness to Miss Murray's fine work and to the large mass of material in Soldan, I treat the subject on new lines so as to bring out the full significance of the movement. We open a page of history which is not only of essential importance in casting the balance-sheet of the Christian religion, but is of peculiar human interest. While psychologists have been busy applying their formulae to the mind of the witch—and have generally come to wrong conclusions—historians have been collecting the scattered evidence, analyzing the reports of trials, and constructing an entirely new idea of the witch-movement. We will trace the rise of the movement and find the solution of its greatest paradox: the fact that it was the strongest and most widespread in the most enlightened, or least illiterate, centuries of the Middle Ages. The solution is that the medieval Church was right in its idea. Witchcraft was organized heresy, a formidable revolt against Christianity.

CHAPTER II

THE REAL WITCH

A complete account of the ingredients of the witch-idea or even of the genuine witch-cult would fill several little volumes like this. We should have to go back to the very dawn of religion or, if the theory of Sir J. G. Frazer is correct, before its dawn. Frazer holds that magic preceded religion. I contend (Little Blue Book No. 1008) that magic and the belief in spirits developed separately. But they are blended in the early idea of the witch: a man or woman who receives magical powers by a league with evil spirits.

Something corresponding to the witch is found, and is dreaded and abhorred, in every stage of human evolution. As we saw, the spirits of the dead were very soon regarded as in very large part malignant and malevolent, and certain persons were held to act in conjunction with them and practice "black magic": to raise destructive storms, to blight crops or cattle, to cause disease, sterility, or death. Sometimes this persisted quite apart from belief in spirits. As we saw, the Romans were not much more definite than the Babylonians in their beliefs about a future life, yet they believed very emphatically in magic and its evil powers. The magician was exposed to a sentence of death in Roman law and was often executed. The ground of the law was, of course,

purely secular. The practicer of black magic was dangerous to the community.

I have not space to tell at all satisfactorily this preparation of the mind of Europe for a belief in witches, but one or two details must be noted. In discussing the religion of Babylon (Little Blue Book No. 1076) I explain how the Babylonians and Assyrians (and Persians) believed that myriads of evil spirits or devils hovered about the face of the earth and caused all the evils of humanity; and that there was a special class of these malignant beings who moved about at night, inspired bad dreams, and even sucked the blood of sleepers. This belief in legions of devils passed through the Jews, into Christianity, and the particular belief in night-prowlers and blood-suckers or entrail-suckers (vampires, harpies, etc.) obtained currency amongst the Greeks and Romans. The Greek and Latin word *strix*, which properly means the screech-owl (so naturally associated with the legend), was applied to these dreaded night-birds.

The Fathers of the Church, particularly St. Augustine, the most influential of them all, denounced magic as "pagan" and as a collusion with the devils. The synods of Elvira (306), Ancyra (314), and Laodicaea (375), and the sermons of St. Chrysostom and the other great preachers, show that the new Christians brought with them the magical practices as well as the vices of the pagan world. It does not seem to have been enough to denounce these as pagan, so St. Augustine worked out a more deadly theory: the diviner or magician, in

whose powers he firmly believed, was in league with the devil. And the Bible was quite clear about such people. It (*Leviticus* xx 27 and *Exodus* xxii 18) defined a witch as one who "hath a familiar spirit" and condemned him or her to death. Moreover, the Latin and Catholic Bible translates verse 5 of Psalm xcvi (Psalm xcv in the Catholic Bible): "The gods of the heathen are *devils*." Paganism and devilism coincided.

The change was lamentable and is responsible for the ghastly tragedy of later years. The Roman persecution of magicians was based entirely on the belief that they had abnormal powers and the progress of enlightenment might have undermined this belief. But if magic meant collusion with the devil, belief in it was sure to be magnified very considerably under a religion which taught that the world swarmed with devils. We shall see, in fact, that it was precisely the elaboration of this devil-doctrine by the great theologians of the Middle Ages which caused the appalling witch-massacres of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. What surprises one at first is that there was comparatively little persecution of witches before the thirteenth century. It was this wonderful thirteenth century, of which modern Catholics are so proud, that inaugurated the massacres on a large scale. A famous philosopher has called it the most stupid century in the whole of the Middle Ages, and certainly it was the most tyrannical, most superstitious, and most sanguinary. The reasons for this we shall see later. We have first to trace the development in the earlier period.

As far as magic is concerned, the Church never wavered, and the practice of its children never relaxed. The situation is analogous to that of the virtue of chastity. The law was clear: the practice almost universally ignored it. On the other hand, there was no consistent attitude in the Church in regard to the *striga* (as the *strix* was now called), the blood-sucking nocturnal creature. The Salic Law in south Germany sentenced the *striga* to death. The Lombard Law treated the idea as a superstition. Under Charlemagne a synod held at Paderborn in 785 enacted (canon 6): "Whosoever, deceived by the devil, believes, as the pagans did, that any person is a witch and can devour men, and therefore burns that person, and gives her flesh to others to eat, shall be put to death." Individual churchmen were just as much at variance. Some believed in the *striga*: others did not.

Characteristically, what the Church was concerned about most was magic of an erotic nature. In 860 the great archbishop of Rheims, Hincmar, held a solemn inquiry into this, as the king's concubine was supposed to have used such magic on the queen, and he concluded that it was genuine deviltry. On the whole, there were few executions of witches until the eleventh century, when we begin to find isolated executions more frequently in the chronicles.

I am, however, more concerned with the other aspects of witchcraft: the suggestion of an organization contained in the belief that witches flew in the air at night in droves or to an appointed gathering place. It is usually said

that there was no organization of witches until the thirteenth century, which would be quite inconsistent with the view that witchcraft was the ancient pagan religion of Europe. The historical truth is not so simple, and it is interesting.

At the end of the tenth century Abbot Regino made a large collection of Church laws and canons, and one of these is concerned with witches. Where and when this canon was passed we do not know. Some scholars trace it to the Synod of Ancyra, in 314, which is impossible, for the Roman world was then almost entirely pagan. It seems to come from some synod of the sixth century. It says:

> And we must not overlook this, that certain wicked women, who have turned aside to Satan, seduced by the illusions and phantasams of the demons, believe and profess that during the night they ride with Diana the goddess of the pagans (another version says or with Herodias) and an innumerable crowd of women on certain beasts, and pass over great spaces of the earth during the night, obeying her commands as their mistress, and on certain nights are summoned to her service. Would that these had perished in their perfidy and had not dragged many with them to destruction! For an innumerable multitude, deceived by this false opinion, believe that these things are true and so depart from the faith and fall into the error of the pagans, believing that there is some divinity apart from the one God. (Migne edition.)

The abbot goes on to say that all this is the work of the devil, who assumes various forms to tempt silly women. The law is reproduced again a few years later in the collection of Bishop Burkhard of Worms (Decreta, bk. IX,

ch. 5), who adds the vampire-idea: that women claim that they can, even while they lie in bed with their husbands, fly out in the air and suck the heart and entrails out of other men who are abed.

A life of Pope Damasus (of the fourth century) pretends that as early as 367 a Roman synod took cognizance of these women who rode on beasts at night with Herodias. This life is probably spurious, but it is clear that by the sixth century (to which the canon seems to belong) there was something very like organized witchcraft in Europe. We will not press the words "innumerable multitude," but clearly numbers of women met by night to honor Diana, the goddess of the moon and of fertility.

This does not surprise us. Europe never voluntarily accepted Christianity. Paganism was driven into dark corners, but age by age the Church had to thunder against it. The women in particular clung to their Diana, if not to the still older mother-earth goddess. Sterility was a curse in those days, however convenient it may seem to moderns. Everything that could counteract it and heat the blood-magic, the aid of a goddess, or even the mutual inspiration of a human orgy—was treasured. The cold advice of Christianity, to pray to Mary, was found less effective in practice and less congenial than the nocturnal adventure. But it had to be conducted with secrecy and cunning, and it seemed as if the women must fly through the air to the point of assembly.

Where I venture to differ from Miss Murray is when she supposes that these more or less organized gatherings persisted and reappeared as the witches of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Dianists disappear, and for centuries the Church deals only with individual magicians, male or female. But a new element was meantime entering European life, and the reader will find that it throws a fascinating light upon witchcraft. It is usual to say that Thomas Aquinas with his absurd demonology, and the Inquisition with its terrible scent for heresy, created witchcraft. Let us try another line.

The true religious history of Europe has never yet been written. Possibly the full truth will never be known, as there has been so much suppression and distortion of facts; but we do know that the accepted version is false. That Christianity was imposed by force upon a reluctant world we may see in Little Blue Book No. 1110; and the current idea of a "conversion" of the Roman world to it is not more false than the almost universal belief that it was meekly accepted, if not profoundly cherished, until modern times. Although our forefathers were robbed of their schools and detained for ages in the densest ignorance, it is to their credit that age after age they, in immense multitudes, rebelled against the corrupt priestcraft and the absurd legend of the Christian religion. It is only by the bloody use of force on a colossal scale that the Church maintained its dominion for so many centuries.

The facts, naturally, concern me more in the

book in which I deal with the Inquisition (Little Blue Book No. 1134) but enough must be said here to show that witchcraft was one expression of the constant effort of the race to rid itself of the religion imposed on it. One of the chief rival religions to Christianity in the fourth century had been Manicheeism, and the writings of St. Augustine, who was at first a Manichaean, but later one of the worst slanderers of the religion, show us how heroically its adherents fought for their creed even long after imperial decrees had declared, under pain of confiscation and death, that Christianity was to be the sole religion of the Empire.

I need say of it here only that it was an ascetic religion, and that it was based essentially on the ancient Persian belief in two supreme principles, one of light and goodness, the other of darkness and evil. Manicheeism was crushed by the aid of the imperial troops but Manichaean ideas were destined still to play a great part in Europe. And one aspect of the religion deserves special notice. It has been, I suppose, the custom of religious bodies from time immemorial to slander and vilify rival bodies. The Romans themselves put the darkest interpretations on the secret gatherings of the Christians; they were said to indulge in sensual orgies, to worship a god with an ass's head and to kill babies for sacramental purposes. So in time the Christians vilified the Manichees; though St. Jerome candidly admits that they were men and women of far stricter virtue than the Christians themselves. Augustine, however, was chiefly instrumental in defaming them.

In writing his life, I discovered a carefully overlooked passage in which, posing as the first Inquisitor, he made a public examination of two Manichees. The first was a girl of twelve, and from the lips of this child the pious elderly bishop drew the confession, by leading questions, that the Manichees made their sacrament of human semen and flour. The second victim was a sacred virgin of the sect, and Augustine at once charged her with what he had put into the mouth of the little girl. To make the sacrament, he said, she had lain nude on the ground, a little heap of flour beside her, and the priests had. . . She protested that she was a virgin, but Augustine's midwives examined her and declared that she was not. Then, Augustine says, she confessed the whole "abominable crime"; in other words, she escaped the drastic punishment of her heresy by letting the bishop have his way and feigning conversion. Later we hear of similar examinations on Manichaean women and confessions of intercourse with "the devil" (probably meaning his representative, the Manichaean priest.)

Here, I am convinced, is the origin of one of the ingredients of the early myth of the witch; though we shall find that in the fully developed witch-cult there was unquestionably a large amount of "intercourse with the devil." However that may be, the Manichaean ideas were merely thrust out of sight, and they broke out again from time to time. One of the most famous heretics of the Greek Church, Paul of Samosata, was the son of a Manichaean mother and his heresy combined the Manichaean princi-

ple of two supreme powers with an early form of Protestantism or evangelical Christianity. The Greek Church and Empire—which, let us remember, had never been tainted by barbarian invasions—were now, in the eighth century, appallingly corrupt, and this purer religion, as it was, spread widely, especially among the Armenians. Emperor after Emperor tried to suppress it. The Empress Theodora put to death no less than 100,000 members of the sect; or, in a few years, made fifty times as many martyrs as the pagans had in three centuries. Finally, in the tenth century, no less than 200,000 members of the sect were transplanted from Armenia to Thrace, to form a living bulwark against the encroachments of the Bulgars.

But within a short time the worthy Paulicians had spread their gospel peacefully among the Bulgars, and Europe was confronted with a new heresy, the Bogomils. You have probably never heard of the Bogomils, but you will surely have heard of those famous heretics of the south of France, the Albigensians, who were drowned by the greatest of the Popes, Innocent III, in their own blood. They (and the Waldensians, the Cathari, the Patarenes, and other obscure bodies of the time) were inspired by the Bogomils and had the same tincture of Manichaean ideas. The orthodox Catholics of France called them *bougres* (Bulgars) and it was thus that the innocent name of a people became the worst swear-word of French and English tongues. They were reproached with having a pope in Bulgaria. In short, from the tenth century onward this revolt against

orthodox Christianity and its corrupt priests and Monks spread over Europe like a prairie fire.

I will tell in Little Blue Book No. 1134 how this early revolt of Europe against Roman Catholicism failed and was drowned in blood, but the reader will already have perceived that here we have the clue to the appearance of witchcraft as a secret and organized cult. The Dianists of the sixth and seventh centuries had gone, and until the twelfth century we find only a few isolated executions of witches for practicing black magic. In the twelfth century these become more frequent. In the thirteenth century the swords of the troops and the fires of the Inquisition suppress heresy; and from that time on witchcraft is recognized by the Church as a secret heresy and a widespread organization.

The Paulicians, Bogomils, Albigensians, etc., were, as usual, slandered by the orthodox. Psellus, one of the leading Greek orthodox writers of the tenth century, wrote a book *On the Operations of the Devils*, in which he included almost as many fables as in his lives of the martyrs. The heretics, he says, used to meet at night by candle light and invoke the devils. When these appeared in the shape of animals, the lights were extinguished and the worshipers indulged in an orgy of sexuality with the devils and with each other. This amiable story passed all over Europe and was applied to the heretics everywhere. It will be enough to quote a letter of Pope Gregory IX to show the

connection with witchcraft. In 1233 Gregory wrote to the bishops of Germany, urging them to seek out and persecute the heretics. The letter (given in the Latin in the *Annales* of Raynaldus, year 1233, p. 89) is one of those weird compositions which bring a smile to the lips when one hears Catholics claim some special divine interest in their church and its popes, but it is too long to be quoted here in full.

The Pope says that amongst these heretics "when a neophyte is received there appears to him a kind of frog," though some say it is a toad. Some kiss it shamelessly on the buttocks, others on the mouth, drawing the tongue and spittle of the animal into their mouths. Sometimes this toad is "as big as a goose or a duck." The neophyte next encounters a "man of extraordinary paleness, with deep black eyes, and so thin that his skin seems to be stretched over his bones." The neophyte kisses him and finds that he is "as cold as ice." The worshipers then sit to table, and a large black cat comes out of a statue, and all of them in the order of their dignity, kiss its buttocks. After a time the lights are extinguished and there is the usual orgy of sexual intercourse. If, the Pope gravely explains, there are more men than women, or women than men, they resort to sodomy. The candles are relit, and they sit again at table, when from a dark corner of the room comes a man "shining like the sun from the loins upward, but rough as a cat below." To this devil the neophyte is presented, and the faithful also give consecrated hosts which

they have stolen from the churches where they have communicated.

This is almost exactly an account of a witch meeting as we shall describe it presently, and the Pope adds another significant detail. These heretics, he says, declare that God is a tyrant, and that he unjustly condemned Lucifer to hell. Lucifer is the real creator of the world and prince of men, and in the end he will regain his place.

In point of fact, the Paulicians and Bogomils and their kin had quaintly mixed the old Persian belief with some of the speculations of the Gnostics. The ancient Persians had believed that the evil principle had created matter which was evil. To Christians the evil principle was Lucifer, and the new heretics contended that Lucifer was one of the two sons of God, unjustly cast off by an overbearing father. He became their "prince" and "lord," and (unlike the Persians) they believed that he would ultimately triumph. This belief either led to or was due to—the details are necessarily obscure, as we know the tenets only from bitter enemies—another departure from Manicheeism. The Manichaeans had been very ascetic, deeming the flesh (as part of the creation of the evil principle) an evil thing; and it is clear that the Albigensians and other European heretics also led strict lives. But the glorification of Lucifer meant that matter and the flesh could scarcely be regarded as evil, and a reaction into orgies was inevitable. The witches, at least, had such orgies.

Here we have almost the whole of the in-

gredients of the witch-cult before our eyes. But another step had to be taken before the evolution was complete. As I said, a number of Christian scholars were skeptical about the supposed powers and activities of the witch. John of Salisbury, bishop of Chartres in the twelfth century, and others refused to believe in the *striga*. Pope Silvester II (Gerbert) was himself accused of magic. Moorish influence was beginning to teach Europe the elements of wisdom. And, curiously enough, it was the crown of this new development, the Scholastic movement, which completed the evolution of the witch and let loose the murderous forces of the Church.

CHAPTER III

THE CATHOLIC MASSACRES

I have several times noted a change of attitude on the part of apologists. In days of general ignorance and of poor historical scholarship it was possible to represent that a beneficent transformation was wrought in Europe when it passed from paganism to Christianity. Most believers still have a vague idea that this is "history," but the mass of facts I have already given show how ludicrous it is. Europe passed into an age of dense ignorance, appalling brutality, and more sexual license than ever. The apologist therefore turns round and says that these things were inevitable on account of the barbaric invasions. We must allow time, he says, for the uplifting and beneficent action of the Christian religion.

And the theme of this book shows with particular clearness that the new apology is no better than the old. I have already shown that Europe got steadily worse for centuries after the triumph of Christianity. Even the thirteenth century brought no relief to the mass of the workers or to women, barely altered the terrible percentage of illiteracy, and left sexual freedom unaltered. Now, in dealing with witchcraft and the Inquisition, we shall find that what is called the best part of the Middle Ages created new and appalling evils; and it was precisely the most religious and most

treasured part of the thirteenth century that wrought the evil.

The Scholastic movement, the rise of the great theologians of the Middle Ages, was one of the effects of the civilizing influence of the Moors. But the religion of Europe was so essentially mischievous that these great scholars spent most of their time in arid and sterile speculation which the modern world finds repellent, and they, instead of discovering the utterly fraudulent bases of the power of the Church, enlarged its power and caused it to exploit and torture humanity worse than ever. The greatest of them all was Thomas Aquinas (who died in 1274), and Thomas, an obese Dominican monk, so narcotized by his religion that he could, if necessary, have proved to demonstration that it was possible for Jonah to swallow the whale, came in time to deal with devils. He endorsed every fable that had entered Christianity from other religions. The world was full of devils and they were just as busy as even Gregory the Great had imagined. With their aid witches could certainly fly through the air by night. They copulated with human beings frequently, and had children. The pious monk even goes into details:

> When children are born of the intercourse of devils with human beings, they do not come from the seed of the devil or of the human body he has assumed, but of seed which he has extracted from another human being. The same devil, who as a woman, has intercourse with a man can also, in the form of a man, have intercourse with a woman.

Thus the case for the witches was completed

by the highest authority in Christendom. The *succubi* (underlying or female) and *incubi* (overlying or male devils), based upon an ancient Babylonian myth about evil spirits, and the nocturnal wanderings, also based upon Babylonian and Roman ideas, were fully vindicated.

Fitly enough, it was in the very year after the death of Thomas Aquinas that a woman was for the first time burned as a witch in the sense that she had had intercourse with the devil; and it was the Dominican monk and Inquisitor Hugo de Beniols who condemned her.

He was trying a large batch of heretics at Toulouse, and amongst them was a noble lady, Angela de la Barthe, fifty-six years old, who was thus accused. Refined and wealthy, she nevertheless "confessed" under torture that she spent the nights in lasciviousness with the devil, and that she had given birth to a child with a wolf's head and a serpent's tail, which had to be fed on the flesh of babies. She used, she said, to go out nightly and steal babies for the purpose. This "monster" often occurs in confessions, and I imagine it means that some poor woman under torture had a miscarriage, and the embryo would look to the priests, who were presumably unfamiliar with such things, like a monstrosity, a lizard, a thing with an animal head and a long tail.

A beautiful monument this poor noble dame's grave would be to the learning of Thomas Aquinas and his Dominican order and the God-inspired wisdom of his Church! It would be

horrible enough if it were the only monument, but it was the first of certainly hundreds of thousands. The learned Sprenger in his *Leben und Lehre des Mohmamed* (I, 264) quotes the estimate that *nine million* witches were put to death, and observes that it is "certainly not an exaggeration." It is generally regarded as a large exaggeration, but we have not the material to give even an approximate estimate. The Inquisition alone is said to have put 30,000 to death. One judge, Remy, boasted that he sentenced 900 in fifteen years in Lorraine. In the diocese of Como a thousand were executed in a year. In three months in 1515 there were 600 witches burned in the bishopric of Bamberg and 900 in the bishopric of Wurtzbirg. In five years 120 of the 600 inhabitants of the small town of Lindheim were burned as witches. Some historians estimate that Henri III of France alone accounted for 30,000. Then there were the Protestant massacres, in Europe and America.

Whatever the number, these Christian Popes and scholars perpetrated a crime in comparison with which the execution of one or two thousand early Christians by the Roman authorities is a mere trifle. Books about witches and devils began to appear. In 1211 one was written by a Marshal of the imperial army. In 1220 a Cistercian monk wrote a treatise. In 1233 Pope Gregory IX, as we saw, endorsed the whole story. But it was the founding of the Inquisition and the suppression of open heresy which created the great witch-cult and inaugurated the terrible massacres. It was the great-

est of the Popes, Innocent III, who bears the heaviest responsibility.

As the secular rulers and their bishops were considered slow in their struggle against the heresy that was spreading in every country, Gregory IX had, in 1232, taken the "inquiry" (*inquisitio*) out of the hands of the bishops and given it in charge of the Dominican monks, acting directly under Rome. This was the founding of the Inquisition as a papal institution, but it was Innocent III, earlier in the century, who had given it a bloody example to follow. When the heretics of the south of France had laughed at the arguments of his legates, he had stooped to the device of appealing to the greed and lust of all the available military adventurers, and had declared the "crusade" which is known in history as the massacre of the Albigensians.

Pope Gregory, we saw, particularly directed the Inquisitors to seek heretics who were in league with the devil. Thomas Aquinas gave the Church a finished manual of devilry, and before the end of the century the Inquisitors in the south of France were condemning women for compacts or cohabitation with the devil. Such trials were still few, when another Pope, John XXII, gave a feverish impulse to the campaign.

The papal court was then at Avignon. The hundred years of comparative virtue (since Hildebrand) which had followed the hundred and fifty years of vice were now over, and the Papacy was almost as corrupt as ever. Petrarch, who lived not far away at the time, called the

"sacred palace" at Avignon "the sins of all vices"; and there were certainly not many vices that were not richly represented by the cardinals. One, however, was black magic, and when, in 1320, a bishop and archbishop or several cardinals sought to bring about the death of the Pope by magical means, John began to take a peculiar interest in the black art.

In every part of Europe the tribunals of the Inquisition now became busy with witches. Between 1320 and 1350 the tribunal at Carcassone tried more than 400 cases of magic, and of these one-half were executed. At Toulouse 600 were charged, and two-thirds of them were handed over to "the secular arm" for execution; lest, of course, the spotless robes and white hands of the Church should be stained with blood. There was a terrible massacre at Berne, and large numbers were burned in Italy. Even an English bishop was accused at Rome of paying homage to the devil; and from Ireland came one of the most definite early cases of alleged witchcraft.

It was again a noble and refined dame, Lady Alice Kyteler (or Kettle): probably one of those high-spirited Irish dames, disdainful of clerical orders, who are happily multiplying in the country today. Lady Alice and her son and daughter and others were arrested and tried. The clergy found a pot of ointment in her room, so, clearly, it was the famous witch-ointment (partly composed of the blood and fat of murdered children) which gave witches the power of flying through the air on a broomstick. The Inquisitor found that she had had criminal intercourse with the devil, whose name is given as Robin Artison, and she was condemned. Lady Alice was smuggled away to England by her noble friends, but a young woman associated with her was executed.

The bishop of Kilkenny, in reporting the event, spoke of "this *new* pestilential set," and other clerics of the time make it begin fairly definitely with the fourteenth century or the second half of the thirteenth. When the persecutors were active at Berne in 1337, they complained that the pest had haunted the city "about sixty years." The Dominican Inquisitor Jaquier spoke in 1458 of this "recent" sect which held "synods of the devil," and ended its meetings with orgies. The Inquisitor Bernard of Como wrote that the *secta strigarum* (the witch sect) arose in the first half of the fourteenth century.

The meaning of this is clear enough. By the end of the thirteenth century the semi-Manichaean heresy which had spread from Armenia and Bulgaria to France was driven underground by the Inquisition or annihilated by troops. Witchcraft is its next form, as we see clearly in cases which presently occurred in the north of France. In 1390 the Paris Parliament had checked the persecution by transferring trials to the civil tribunals, but some decades later the clerics, who complained much of lay skeptics, returned to their work. A professor of Paris University, W. Adeline, was in 1453 brought before the bishop for denying the reality of witchcraft. In face of the terror the scholar fell on his knees, weeping, and con-

fessed (as they wanted) that he was himself in league with the devil and had trampled on the crucifix. He was leniently dismissed with a sentence of imprisonment for life.

The clerics had regained power, and they made a fearful use of it. At Douai a woman was brought before the Inquisition on the ground that she was a Waldensian. She was forced to accuse others, who in turn denounced others, until a large number of victims confronted the Inquisitor. Under a promise of light sentences if they confessed, they all glibly agreed that they had gone to witch-meetings on oiled broomsticks, had met the devil in the form of a goat or ape, and had concluded with a general orgy. The savage Inquisitor then handed them over to the secular arm, and they, protesting that they had been deceived into making the statements, said that it was all false. Six of them were executed.

The Inquisitor next year sought to repeat his triumph at Amiens, but the good bishop, who seems to have been a sinner, pooh-poohed the story and discharged the accused. The Inquisitor went on to Arras, where the bishop was more pious or more greedy, and the charges spread from house to house until there was a reign of terror in the city. Under torture—one woman was tortured fifteen times—they recklessly denounced any acquaintance to get relief. A large number of victims were condemned, and men and women fled in panic from the city, which actually lost its commercial prestige. In 1491 the lawyers of the Paris Parlement took up the cases, analyzed the

records, and found that the whole of them had been wrongly condemned; and one is pleased to learn that, by royal order, this finding of the Parlement was nailed on the door of the bishop's palace.

I must reserve for another book a description of the scandalous method of procedure of the Inquisition, but may draw attention here to two points. First, except in England torture was habitually used in the examination of witnesses, and the tortures were fiendish. There was one especially used for women accused of witchcraft. This was a chair the seat of which was either studded with point-upward nails—one chair had two thousand nails—or a metal plate under which a fire was lit. There the poor creatures sat until they either accused themselves (or a neighbor) of conserting with the devil—or died. At Lindheim, where the most fearful persecution occurred, six women were executed because they confessed under torture, that they had stolen the body of a child for witch-purposes. After the execution the husband of one of the woman opened the grave and found the child's body there uninjured; and the monk Inquisitor declared the body to be a counterfeit made by the devil and ordered it to be burned!

The second point, which we shall find much more serious in the general study of the work of the Inquisition, is that it imposed heavy fines and confiscated the goods of its victims! The clergy, the Inquisitors, and the informers (who were never named in court) shared these funds. Such procedure would disgrace sav-

ages. Thousands of victims of the Inquisition had only one heresy: a good bank account.

Moreover, in the frenzy for witch-hunting that now set in even honest judges lost their heads and committed monstrosities of judgment. A case is on record of a little girl of eight years who was solemnly tried for witchcraft because playmates said that she could make mice. The poor child had made "mice" by folding and knotting her handkerchief into some fancied resemblance to mice.

And it was again the Popes who were responsible for the new epidemic. Eugenius IV had in 1437 urged the Inquisitors to look out for witches. They found plenty in France, Italy, and Switzerland, but in Germany their zeal was checked by comparatively humane rulers and bishops. The spirit that begot the Reformation was growing. But the German Inquisitors, Institor and Sprengel, reported to Rome that Germany was full of witches, of both sexes, and that they formed a well organized sect. A book had been published in German so describing them. The Pope, Innocent VIII, thereupon issued his famous Bull, *Summis Desiderantes*, in 1484, lashing the clergy everywhere to the attack on witches. The Inquisitors themselves two years later compiled a manual for the use of judges—the notorious "Hammer of Witches" (*Malleus maleficarum*)—and Europe again stank with burning flesh and echoed with the groans of tortured women.

It is impossible for me here to follow the progress of the crusade, which continued, as

my quotation in the first chapter (for the year 1629) shows, through the seventeenth century. The ghastly scenes which are there described by a weighty eye-witness were common at the time in Catholic Germany. In Spain they were still burning witches at the end of the eighteenth century; in Spanish America in the nineteenth century. These things may be read in any history of witchcraft. Here I would give my readers information which they cannot so easily find elsewhere.

What was this Papacy which now lashed the world to its grand attack on the witch-heresy? It was once more, as it had been at Avignon when John XXII thundered against magic, "the sink of all the vices." Innocent VIII himself had outlived the vices of his youth—he had an illegitimate son, the most profligate noble in Rome when he became Pope, but he was a senile good-for-nothing who saw the cardinals and future Popes around him paint the Eternal City scarlet with their amours, and said nothing. And the three Popes who followed his example in hounding the Inquisitors against witches were Alexander VI (father of six children, the frankest libertine who ever called himself the Vicar of Christ), Julius II (father of two children and a man of unrestrained passions), and Leo X (who is accused by his chamberlain of worse vices than Alexander VI and was at least destitute of moral delicacy). Another book tells the story of these Popes of the Renaissance, and much of it may be read in my *Popes and Their Church*.

Finally, we cannot quit this section of the

subject without a word about Joan of Arc: the remarkable girl burned as a witch by the Church in 1431 and (for political reasons) declared a saint by the same Church in our time. A full discussion would require an entire volume, and I will here merely summarize the reflections of Miss Murray in her book, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe.*

Miss Murray, the ablest writer on witchcraft in our time, is of the opinion that Joan was a witch. We have already seen enough to consider that proposition impartially. Maids of Joan's age were frequently witches. The chancellor of the bishop of Wurtzburg tells, in the letter I quoted in the first chapter, of several of the fairest and most virtuous maids in the city suffering for witchcraft. We shall see more of this in the next chapter.

Moreover, Joan's greatest friend in the French army, Gilles de Rais (or Retz), was an acknowledged witch. Shaw's representation of Gilles in his play is very misleading. He was at the time, though in his early twenties, a very earnest and able soldier. He became a Marshal, at the age of twenty-five, and he is described in the *Grande Encyclopedie* as "one of the finest intelligences of the time." Unfortunately he had not a balanced mind, and when he left the army to pursue his magical studies in his princely chateau, he fell into the most scandalous excesses, even killing children for his experiments. He is the original of the Bluebeard story. There is much probability in Miss Murray's contention that he vacillated between the two religions, but he frankly confessed that he had been a witch and he was executed as such. Joan chosé him as her special protector in the army, and he was devoted to her.

Another courtier of the time, the king's favorite noble, Pierre de Giac, was a witch. Before execution—he also was a sorry scoundrel—he said that he had given one of his hands to the devil, and he asked that that hand should be cut off before he died. Miss Murray believes that the Duc d'Alençon himself was a witch, if not the Grand Master.

The evidence in regard to Joan is puzzling and contradictory. Time after time when she was asked a question, and an emphatic negative answer would be expected from any orthodox Christian, she refused to reply or replied evasively. She would not say if she believed fairies to be, as the Church certainly held, evil spirits. She would not explicitly reply when it was said that she had been taught witchcraft and magic. She would not swear on the Gospels, and would not repeat the Paternoster except in confession. She had seen "St. Michael" with her bodily eyes, in the shape of a "good man." Her "St. Catherine" was physically present somehow in her castle-prison. She had seen "God," in a scarlet cap and long white robe. She spoke throughout of "those of my party"—she had a secret sign on her letters for them—and she sometimes saw her saints, or the sources of her voices, "amongst the Christians."

All this is counterbalanced by assurances that she is a good Christian, so that it is very

difficult to reach a confident decision. There is certainly serious ground to reopen the question and analyze minutely the whole record of her trial. That is a task that could not be done here, and we must leave the question open. In view of our present knowledge of witchcraft there would be nothing in the least surprising if we found that Joan was a witch. But she was evidently neither a perfectly orthodox witch nor a perfectly orthodox Christian. It seems probable that she had been initiated, in the way we shall see in the next chapter, but was not devoted to the cult in anything like the whole-hearted fashion in which young women usually adhered to it.

CHAPTER IV

THE SECRET CULT

It is now time that we formally considered the question, what witchcraft really was. The prevailing, almost universal, opinion of those who at length rose against the persecution, and of the nineteenth-century writers on witchcraft, was that the cult or organization and all the details alleged about it were a creation of popular credulity and monkish imagination. The secret meetings or Sabbaths were thought to have been as fictitious as the ride through the air on a greased broomstick. The "devil" who is put as the central object of the cult was declared a fiction. The witches' mark, the orgies, the homage, and all the rest were regarded as wholly imaginary. Inquisitors wrote their manuals of these things, and the unfortunate men and women confessed whatever they willed in order to put an end to the diabolical tortures. Death for witchcraft was preferable to a life thus prolonged; indeed very few in any case were ever acquitted by the Inquisition. Bernard Shaw's dramatic version of its procedure looks rather like a meeting of a committee of the Fabian Society to judge a member for, say, reading H. G. Wells. The Inquisitors had bowels of brass.

It is quite certain—we have already seen instances—that thousands of victims of the witch-

hunters were good Christians, driven by torture to confess anything that the torturer wanted. Suicide was common amongst them. Remy, the French witch-judge, says that he knew fifteen cases of suicide in one year. But it is clearly a mistake to ascribe the whole of the details to imaginations, fear, hysteria, or sex-obsession.

In the first place, torture was not used in England. A fiendish witch-finder like Hopkins had his own irregular way of torturing the women he suspected, but after arrest and during trial they were questioned without torture; and they tell the same story as the tortured witches of the continent. Miss Murray deals especially with English witches, and she makes this clear. What I am about to describe of their organization and ritual could be based entirely upon the testimony of English witches. They often gloried in their "religion." At Northampton a mother and daughter were led together to the scaffold. A priest exhorted them to pray, and "they both set up a very loud laughter," says an eye-witness, "calling for the devil to come and help them," and deriding Christianity.

Nor are all the testimonies to witchcraft merely the statements of prisoners. There was a remarkable case at Lille in 1661. A home for poor and ignorant girls was presided over by a Mme. Bourignon, a pious Christian, and she was horrified to discover that thirty-two of the girls were witches. There was no crowd-psychology or suggestion. In friendly

conversation with her they explained that they had been dedicated in the religion as children and would not abandon it and become Christians.

"No," said a young woman of twenty-two whom she tried to convert, "I will not be other than I am: I find too much content in my condition."

It is, in fact, one of the most common and most distressed observations of the less fanatical Inquisitors that a very large proportion of the witches "blasphemed" to the end, as they say, and took pride in their religion. Cases are not unknown in which they sought death. There was a remarkable case in Scotland in 1670. An educated and highly respected man, Major Weir, voluntarily surrendered to the authorities, declared himself a witch, and was executed. His reputation for integrity of conduct was such that a woman who had once detected him in some irregularity and told others was publicly flogged for defaming so respectable a citizen. Major Weir was a tall dark man, dressed in black, and it is probable that he was (in the sense which we will presently describe) head of the Scottish witches.

De Lancre, the famous French lawyer and witch-judge of the seventeenth century, made a close study of the witches he tried and he wrote one or two books about them. Instead of finding the women terrorized by torture into confessing anything that the examiners wanted them to admit, he notes with great surprise and perplexity that they tell a con-

sistent story, deliberately and even joyfully adhere to it, and unquestionably have a very real religion. From the long quotation from his works which Miss Murray reproduces, in old French, in her book I translate the following passages:

A very distinguished witch tells us that she has always believed that witchcraft is the best religion. Jeanne Dibasson, twenty-nine years old, tells us that the Sabbath is the true Paradise where there is more pleasure than one can express. Marie de la Ralde, twenty-eight years old, a very beautiful young woman, deposes that she takes special pleasure in going to the Sabbath. . . as to a wedding, not so much for the liberty and license they have together (which, from modesty, she says she has never done or seen done) but because the devil kept their hearts and will so attached that it was hardly possible for any other desire to enter. . .She went there with much more pleasure than to Mass, for the devil gave them to understand that he was the real God. . . There are, in fine, witches so devoted to his diabolical service that no torture or torment can surprise them, and they say that they go to a real martyrdom and to death for love of him as gaily as they would go to a festival or a public rejoicing. When they are arrested, they do not weep or shed a single tear, either over their false martyrdom or the torture; and the scaffold is to them so pleasant that some of them are in a hurry to be executed, and they joyously endure the trial, they are in such a hurry to be with the devil.

In short, we have such a mass of testimony that is obviously not wrung from terrorized witnesses, we have such an abundance of cases in which the witch defiantly meets her end with the witch-creed on her lips, whereas a Christian tortured into momentary "confessions" would at least end in prayer and repentance, that there is no room for doubt about the reality of witchcraft. It was an organized anti-Christian religion. And there is, in every country, consistent testimony as to the main features of the cult. Local variations are given, but there is agreement on broad lines, and we have a fair knowledge of the secret religion.

In substance it has nothing to do with ancient paganism. It is monotheistic. All our accounts of it are written down by Christian clerks or judges, so that the central object of the cult is always spoken of as "the devil." The writers invariably state, however, that the witches insist that this being is "the true god." He is their lord, master and prince.

At times it seems as if the witches must themselves have used the word devil, saying that the devil was the real God, and from the account of the evolution of witchcraft which I gave in the second chapter, we can understand this. Lucifer, the brilliant son of the Old Testament God, and therefore a God, was the object of the cult. An early Christian legend says that Lucifer's only sin was pride—which is not a sin—and even Milton comes very near to making a god of Satan in his *Paradise Lost*. It is the Gnostic-Manichaean idea, or confusion of ideas, which I have previously described. The principle of darkness and matter is Lucifer; he is no longer evil, and he will eventually triumph. It is to reunion with him that the dying witches look forward.

It is further quite clear that Lucifer was represented by living men whom we may more or

less conceive in the position of bishops of the early Church. These were the chiefs or leaders or grand masters of the witches in any region. Such a person, apparently, was Major Weir; and his case strongly reminds us of the ancient idea, so fully discussed by Sir J. G Frazer, that the God or his representative must die for the people. Gilles de Rais seems to have held the same position. It is suspected that Earl Bothwell of Scotland was another.

At all events, the witches everywhere and unanimously speak of some living person who is to them "the devil"—their master or his representative in the flesh. Lady Kyteler of Kilkenny had her "Robin Artison." "Robin" seems to have been a common name for this mysterious chief. He visits the witches in their houses or in quiet places. He is incessantly approaching women and pressing them to join the secret religion. As a rule he is dressed in black or other sober ordinary clothes, though he has a special mark on his boot. But his movements are mysterious, and he impresses the women more or less with awe. None of them whose words are recorded give us a clear idea of how they conceived the relation of this chief to Lucifer. The better educated witches, as a rule, tell us nothing of their creed, and the ignorant women who talk most were possibly not fully initiated. To most of them the chief seems a semi-supernatural person, though in some cases they frankly speak of him as a quite well known

man of their own district, the secret organizer of the sect.

The chief had an assistant who helped to give notice of meetings, and so on. This man seems to have succeeded to the mastership when the chief died. There were no elections, so that the succession must have been by nomination. Heads of the local groups or "covens" also were appointed. The local unit of the cult was a group of thirteen men and women (or twelve and a leader) called a "coven," which seems to be a corruption of "convene." Possibly the idea was founded on the story of Christ and his twelve disciples.

The great assemblies or Sabbaths were, naturally, at the primitive festival times of the race, spring and autumn. The first, the Walpurgis Night of the German witches, was held on the eve of May 1st, and the second on the eve of November 1st. Later a midsummer Sabbath and one at Christmas were added, and in places there were other festivals on the Christian feast-days. There were lesser meetings, called Esbats, for business purposes and to report and deliberate on their magical practices, and in the end these seem generally to have been held on Fridays: possibly in derision of the Christian veneration of Friday, the supposed day of Christ's death.

The ritual of the Sabbath is so consistently given by the witches everywhere that we can confidently describe it. A few women under torture might "confess" that they had ridden on broomsticks and made ointment of babies'

fat, but the reliable witnesses tell a quite plausible story. Some quiet spot in the neighborhood, a hill, a wood, or (if available) an ancient stone monument, was appointed for the meeting, and in the dead of night the witches found their way to it; generally on foot, as it was not usually far away, but often on horse or ass. The hour of assembly was midnight, and the festival usually lasted until near dawn.

Paying homage to the chief was the first item. The living representative of Lucifer was on those occasions always disguised, and the women vaguely imagined that they were in the presence of their "god." They speak of him as having the form of a bull, a goat, an ape, a cat, a dog, or some other animal, and it seems clear that at least the lower part of his body was clad in the skin of a sheep or goat, the tail hanging behind. In some cases he seems to have worn a mask at the back of his head or above his tail.

Homage meant kissing some part of his anatomy, and there cannot be the slightest doubt, so numerous and consistent are the testimonies of the reliable witnesses, that kissing his buttocks was practically a universal custom. Old members might kiss his face, and even neophytes might be directed to kiss his cheek, arm, or thigh. Curiously enough, in the case of a phallic religion, as witchcraft certainly was, we very rarely hear of witches being directed to kiss the part which one would expect; though, as we shall see presently, there may have been a special reason for this. But

nearly every single witness speaks of kissing his buttocks, though they never use so polite a word as that.

And an important part of this ceremony was that mothers presented their children, particularly baby girls, to the "devil." The formula given by several witnesses is: "Great Lord, whom I worship, I bring you this new servant who desires to be your slave forever." The girls, it seems, returned at about the age of nine and repeated the homage in their own names, and the "grand mistress" or "queen of the Sabbath"—some lady who was closely allied with the chief—then directed them to renounce the Christian God, Jesus, the Church, the sacraments, the clergy and monks, and everything connected with the prevailing religion. In places, at least, they had to trample or spit on a cross marked in the ground. They then kissed the usual sacred part and received what was known throughout the Middle Ages as "the witch's mark." In England, especially, much stress was laid on this mark. The witch-finders, knowing that no torture could be used in the trial, as on the continent, concentrated on searching for the witch's mark in a suspect, and Hopkins used quite effective torture in finding it.

A weird chapter could be written on the marks that were reported in court. The thighs, buttocks and pubic parts of the suspects were minutely examined by the agents of the Holy Church, and every mark or pimple that nature had produced was described in grossly exaggerated language. Supernumerary nipples, which

we now know to be fairly common in women, and are even found in men, were selected as indubitable proofs of diabolic action. They seem to have been examined with clerical magnifying glasses, as we read of immense teats in the most surprising parts of the witch's anatomy. In point of fact, there seems to have been a general practice of marking those who were initiated to witchcraft at the Sabbaths. The mark was, however, a simple puncture made with an awl or sharpened bone. Whether anything was smeared on the instrument we cannot say, but the "insensible area" for which the witch-finders looked is simply a figment.

That children were thus presented seems undeniable. A very curious case of witchcraft is reported from Catholic Germany as late as 1746. The sub-prioress of a convent near Wurtzburg, Sister Maria Renata, was charged with witchcraft and a prolonged examination followed. The nun was fifty-nine years old, yet the other nuns said that she prowled about the convent at night, howled, pinched them, and slapped them with a leather strap, as they lay in bed, on the more resonant parts of their person. She was treated as one possessed, and one is disposed to believe that the priests who flocked to the convent to exorcise the devils must have driven her to the verge of hysteria. In the examination before the Inquisition, however, she told a story which seems to be substantially true. She said that when she was a girl of fourteen, and was with her family in Vienna, an officer in the army had presented her at a witch meeting. Several Viennese

noble ladies were present, she said, and they used to meet in a wood and dance, naked, at the witch assemblies. Details may, perhaps, come from her inflamed imagination, but it seems hardly doubtful that she was initiated at fourteen and compelled by her parents to enter the convent at nineteen. She had her revenge by admitting the devil (a lover) once a week and playing upon the superstitions of the stupid nuns. She was executed as a witch and, as usual, her body was burned.

Numberless cases are given of girls being presented at all ages, from babyhood upward. In 1678 Lucy Bertitsch of Rostock, a girl of twelve, confessed, without torture, that she had been presented, and that three men were assigned to her as "bridegrooms"; and of their intercourse, she placidly told the judges, she could still not think without a feeling of great joy. She was burned. At Gleichenberg there were six cases of young married women who, being allied with brutal and drunken husbands, sought consolation in the orgies of the witches. In short, initiation is quite common at every age of girlhood and young womanhood. As Joan of Arc's mother had taught Joan her Christian prayers, Miss Murray does not think that the mother was a witch and that Joan was dedicated as a baby; though there is more than a suspicion that her god-mother was a witch. It seems probable that Joan was presented as a young girl, but never became entirely a witch. It was not unusual to swear allegiance merely for a stated number of years.

After the entire assembly had paid homage

the chief received reports from local officers, and the dance, which seems to have been the most important part of the solemnity, took place. Dancing and feasting, in fact, occupied the remaining hours of the night. The witches brought food with them, and we may confidently suppose that the dance and the feast alternated. Ring dances especially if there was a sacred stone, were common, but a kind of follow-the-leader dance, across country, was very popular. The women often visibly light up with joy as they describe to the judge the wild dance across the country, the "devil" often playing pipes, leading the way, his tail wagging before the crowd, and the long stream of witches, at the highest pitch of excitement, following in a line. The flute, drum, and other instruments also were used.

We have here a somewhat confused experience. Miss Murray calls this part of the solemnity "the fertility rites," and no doubt it was in a sense a continuation of the genuine fertility rites of the old religions. But one may conjecture that frank human joy in the sensual abandonment of the hour was the chief motive and one of the chief attractions of the cult. As we saw on an earlier page, there were virtuous witches who denied that they had ever seen any impropriety at the Sabbaths, and we must suppose that there were groups of a purely religious character or groups which did not invite their most ascetic member to the nocturnal orgies. That there was quite generally a sexual orgy is put beyond question by the almost unanimous testimony of the witches.

It was their revenge on the unnatural moral code of the Church or the hypocrisy with which people professed to venerate it. On these four quarter days the Dionysiac urge which was in every healthy woman was given an entire freedom, and for several hours of the night the quiet woods of France, Germany, or England witnessed such scenes as had long ago been enacted in the scented groves of Antioch or Paphos.

The orgy as such was not the chief rock of offense to the Church. In practice the Church had never insisted on the quixotic counsels of Christ. What the Inquisitors fastened on was the charge of carnal intercourse with the devil; and it now seems clear that this was a reality. Quite commonly the witches, the untortured English witches as well as the continental, confess that they copulated with the devil, at any period after the age of twelve. It may seem strange that one man could be so generally charged, but there is a great deal to be said for Miss Murray's suggestion that an artificial means was used. Such things are known in older phallic religions, where women came to the priests to be demaidenized.

In some place, either at the Sabbath or elsewhere, the "devil" celebrated a black mass. Animals were commonly sacrificed, and there is only too good ground to believe that children were occasionally sacrificed, especially to provide the blood at the black mass. The wafer was generally stolen from the Church, the man or woman going to communion and keeping the wafer dry in his mouth until he was out of

sight. The most notorious case is that of the famous Mme. de Montespan in 1679. In her frenzy to regain the love of Louis XIV she got the Abbé Guiborg, who was clearly a witch, if not a chief, to say mass, with a child's blood in the chalice. The child was bought for "a crown." We have plenty of corroboratory evidence; and it is curious to find that Christian babies were never so used. Christian mothers of the time notoriously guarded the unbaptized children from the witches.

CHAPTER V

THE PROTESTANT MASSACRES

The fascinating revelation from a closer study of witchcraft has so absorbed my pen that I have little space left to describe the last phase. I am, however, as I said, not attempting to give in this small space a history of witchcraft or telling details that may be read in the ordinary manuals. I am concerned with principles and with interpretations that are not usually given.

The Reformers brought no relief to the witches of Europe. Indeed it is of the essence of my view that witchcraft was a bitterly anti-Christian religion, and the Reformers were not likely, on their own principles, to be less hostile to it than the Catholics. Luther's sturdy common sense did, it is true, make him hesitate. He and Melanchthon are enumerated by the Jesuits (who now succeeded the Dominican and Franciscan monks as Inquisitors) amongst the heterodox as regards witchcraft. He did not believe in witches flying to the Sabbath; but he did believe in magical powers and he most particularly believed in the devil. It was the Protestant emphasis on the devil and on the Bible (which explicitly condemns the witch to death) that caused as great massacres in Reformed countries as in Roman Catholic lands.

There is nothing to choose between them Far more witches were burned in Britain after

the Reformation than before it. The stupid frenzy of James I—originating in one of the wildest legends, that witches had caused the terrible storms that kept his bride in Denmark —has scarcely a parallel in royal history. The loathsome activity of Hopkins and other witch-finders is in one sense as bad as the activity of the Inquisition; though British Protestant Law never permitted the diabolical tortures which disgraced Catholic countries and drove tens of thousands of innocent men and women to false self-accusations, insanity, suicide, and the scaffold. The bloody panic in Massachusetts, under Cotton Mather, in 1691-2 is almost as horrid a page as one can read in the history of medieval Europe.

But it is no part of my program and is entirely beyond the limits of my space, to repeat the familiar story. From my point of view it is more important to realize how the ghastly persecution was brought to a close.

Writers on the subject commonly describe the series of early critics who first wielded the pen against the witch-massacres. A Lutheran, Johann Weier, seems to have been one of the first critics, though his work *De Praestigus Daemonum* regards the women as possessed by the devil and merely questions the less plausible phenomena. Several other Protestant doctors and professors (Ewick, Gödelmann, etc.), not generally mentioned in history, repeated the arguments of Weier in 1584 and 1585, long before any Catholic writer attacked witchcraft. At the same time an English squire of some learning, Reginald Scott, wrote a *Dis-*

coverie of Witchcraft (1584) in which he denied the whole of the alleged phenomena. King James and various Anglican scholars replied to the book, and it is not paradoxical to say, while doing all honor to the critics, that the orthodox writers were right. Witchcraft, we have now seen, was, when it was quite sincere, a religion in deadly hostility to Christianity. When it was not deeply religious, it was a revolt against the Christian ethic.

It was half a century later when the first Catholic writers, the Jesuits Tanner (1626) and Spee (1631) criticized the witch-persecutions. What is more worthy of attention is that all the scholars of Christendom united for centuries approving the outrage. Now that we discover that witchcraft was an anti-Christian religion, the apologists will probably turn round and ask us to think it quite natural that it should be persecuted; forgetting that the discovery puts the witches on a level with the Christian martyrs, and that, while the Roman authorities put only a few hundred people to death, and in virtue of their secular laws, the Christian clergy made martyrs by the hundred thousand, if not the million, and on purely religious grounds. It is part of the general question of persecution or toleration; and any Church which *now* defends the use of bloody arms in self-defense at any period of history must refrain from complaint if it ever itself encounters persecution.

To me witchcraft is a fascinating study, not because its fortunes cast upon the Church the odium of a ghastly crime, not because it is,

in part at least, a picturesque illustration of the revenge of the race for the restrictions laid upon it by its traditions, but because it shows how a very large part of Europe rebelled in every age against the Christian religion. Under Roman tyranny it was one of the few possible escapes. As soon as some enlightenment spread, Europe was covered with a network of religious Albigensians, Waldensians, Patarenes, Cathari, Lollards, Russites, etc., and when the former or quite non-Christian of these bodies were driven underground they became a sect of witchcraft that still spread over Europe.

Most remarkable of all is the high proportion of women in the sect. When it was considered an hysterical movement, a fabric of fictions, this seemed plausible enough, but it is not so easily understood now that we recognize witchcraft as an anti-Christian cult. The medieval writers and Inquisitors attributed the fact to the greater malice of the sex: an explanation which, in view of the religious preponderance of women today, their clerical successors are reluctant to repeat. Modern scholars look for scientific explanations. Some, naturally, turn to psycho-analysis, which seems to me to throw no light whatever on such problems, while others point out that from time immemorial magic has fallen to the woman just as fighting and hunting have fallen to the man. But the magic was incidental in witchcraft. The essential thing was the worship of Lucifer and the renunciation of Christ.

Possibly the very degradation which Christianity had brought upon woman, and which is so little realized by the church-going woman of modern times, counted for a good deal of the revolt. Possibly in those ages of universal ignorance there was no emotional bias of the woman in favor of religion, as there was when, at least until recently, men were better educated than women. Possibly—indeed more than possibly—since the organizers of the sect were males, and its services were largely phallic, there was far more zeal to proselytize amongst women. The whole subject needs a fresh analysis, and a tiny volume such as this can do no more than offer a few suggestions.

All the Weiers and Flades and Scotts and Spees of the sixteenth and seventeenth century had little influence on the persecution of witches: that is to say, on religious persecution in general. The massacres almost extinguished the sect. The growing spirit of liberty removed the occasion for it. Deists and Rationalists, who could strike at the very root of the principle of religious persecution, killed the witch-hunters. Montaigne, Bayle, Beccaria, Voltaire—such men brought the world gradually back to sanity and humanity. As the light increased in the eighteenth century even clerics looked in each other's faces and blushed for the traditions of their Churches. The Inquisition might ply its bloody trade in Spain until 1782, when Voltaireans came along, and in Spanish America until the middle of the nineteenth century. In rural districts the people might still hunt the witch. I found a case of witch-swimming in the London news-

papers of 1825. There was a witch burned in a cottage in Ireland not twenty years ago. But the light increases, and the whole world now looks back with horror upon the ghastly and prolonged nightmare of the race—in the ages of faith.

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